

Bible Characters – John the Baptist

(Matthew 3:1-17; 4:12; 11:2-19; 14:1-13

- Mark 1:1-15; 6:14-29; 9:11-13

- Luke 1; 3:1-22; 7:18-35; 9:7-9

- John 1:1-51)

As we move from the OT to the NT, John the Baptist is among the most important people we encounter. The reason for this is not a result of his own doing, but how and what God accomplishes through him. Here we see that God is fully sovereign. He uses John's brief ministry to point to Himself – that is – Jesus Christ having arrived as the Messiah. Also, we recognize the importance of surrendering to God in obedience, just as John does, and reaching out to Jesus at all times, especially in times of hardship, suffering and persecution.

While we learn about the entire life and death of John – mentioned throughout the Gospels (Luke 1; Matthew 3; John 1; Matthew 11:1-19; Mark 6:14-29) the Bible tells us that God primarily works through John as a witness to testify that Jesus is the promised Messiah:

“Then John testified, ‘I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.’” (John 1:32-34 NLT).

As such, John is the last prophet prior to Jesus’ arrival to fulfil prophecy and proclaim Jesus as Savior:

“Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, ‘He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming! Clear the road for him! The valleys will be filled, and the mountains and hills made level. The curves will be straightened, and the rough places made smooth. And then all people will see the salvation sent from God.’” (Luke 3:4-6 NLT).

However, as we learn too, John is unjustly imprisoned by Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:3-5; Mark 6:17-20; Luke 3:19-20). It is from prison that John reaches out to Jesus to affirm, that He is indeed the Messiah: “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?” (Matthew 11:3 NLT). It is here, that we see in Jesus’ response to John, God’s divine love and care – as Jesus affirms His Messiahship (Matthew 11:4-6; Luke 7:18-23).

In summary, we can see in the life and events surrounding John the Baptist that God accomplishes His sovereign divine plan in and through people, as we see in John’s life, who have a heart bent towards Him. Even (and especially) in times of persecution God works in and through every believer, including in times of doubt – as we see in John’s life – so as to ensure that even though we may feel alone or abandoned, the truth is – we are not. Christ lives and

works through us by faith as we surrender to Him (Hebrews 12:1-4). The most important lesson we can learn here, as followers of Christ, is that – just as John does, God wants us to reach out to Him, foremost in times of trial and persecution, as we call out to Him in faith, being aware, as the Bible reveals – that God always listens to our heartfelt prayers and answers – according to His own perfect plan, purpose and timing. As Jesus reveals to both John and us: “God blesses those who do not fall away because of me.” (Matthew 11:6 NLT).

For further study:

Gardner P. *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters: The Complete Who's Who in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

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